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ABSTRACT

Another in a series of Task Force on Ethnic Studies units, this document contains over 60 poems of the American Indian. Other units in this series are SO 005 534 through SO 005 551. (CPH)

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SP 005 545

POETRY to the Indian has always been the salt of life. The chants, songs, and plain stories telling of the history and traditions, were poetic works colored with the individuality and feeling for the language which is inherent in the Indian.

IT IS SAID that the culture of a people is best seen in their poetry and the extent of its development. If this indeed is true, then the Native American youth embodies the greatest hope for all of us. In no other race on this continent is there found so much sheer beauty of expression and poetry which is honest and unstilted, as there is among our own Indian youth.

BATTLE WON IS LOST

They said, "You are no longer a lad."
I nodded.
They said, "Enter the council lodge."
I sat.
They said, "Our lands are at stake."
I scowled.
They said, "We are at war."
I hated.
They said, "Prepare red war symbols."
I painted.
They said, "Count coups."
I scalped.
They said, "You'll see friends die."
I cringed.
They said, "Desperate warriors fight best."
I charged.
They said, "Some will be wounded."
I bled.
They said, "To die is glorious."
They lied.

Phil George, Nez Perce

The quiet, subtle laughter of women
as they prepare the meal.
The food, hot and steaming, nourishing,
served in a pottery bowl; the same color as the people.
The glow of the awakening sun as it pours itself
into the darkness of mud-plastered walls beginning another day.
This is the world of the Pueblo.

And now this is the new day:
The laughter is still subtle, still quiet.
The food is still hot, still humbly accepted and given thanks for.
Only the plaster has changed,
but the sun is still round, like the pottery,
like the kiva, and still the color of the people.

Larry Bird, Pueblo

DAWN BOY'S SONG ON ENTERING WHITE HOUSE

In the house of long life, there I wander.
In the house of happiness, there I wander.
Beauty before me, with it I wander.
Beauty behind me, with it I wander.
Beauty below me, with it I wander.
Beauty above me, with it I wander.
Beauty all around me, with it I wander.
In old age traveling, with it I wander.
On the beautiful trail I am, with it I wander.

SONG OF THE EARTH SPIRIT, ORIGIN LEGEND

It is lovely indeed, it is lovely indeed.
I, I am the spirit within the earth...
The feet of the earth are my feet...
The legs of the earth are my legs...
The bodily strength of the earth is my bodily strength...
The thoughts of the earth are my thoughts...
The voice of the earth is my voice...
The feather of the earth is my feather...
All that belongs to the earth belongs to me...
All that surrounds the earth surrounds me...
I, I am the sacred words of the earth...
It is lovely indeed, it is lovely indeed.

NAVAJO CORN SONG

Among the Navajos a corn song was supposedly sung by the Home God, who was the first to plant corn.

The corn grows up.
The waters of the dark clouds drop, drop.
The rain descends.
The waters from the corn leaves drop, drop.
The rain descends.
The waters from the plants drop, drop.
The corn grows up.
The waters of the dark mists drop, drop.

ZUNI CORN SONG

As the Indian woman ground the corn, she sang one of the ancient corn songs of her people, such as:

O, my lovely mountain,
To' yallanne!
O, my lovely mountain,
To' yallanne!
To' yallanne!

* * *

Lovely! See the cloud, the cloud appear!
Lovely! See the rain, the rain draw near!
Who spoke?
"Twas the little corn-ear
High on the tip of the stalk
Singing while it looked at me
Talking aloft there—
"Ah, perchance the floods
Hither moving—
Ah, may the floods come this way!"

* * *

Yonder, yonder see the fair rainbow,
See the rainbow brightly decked and painted!
Now the swallow bringeth glad news to your corn,
Singing, "Hitherward, hitherward,
hitherward, rain,
"Hither come!"
Singing, "Hitherward, hitherward,
hitherward, white cloud,
"Hither come!"
Now hear the corn-plants murmur,
"We are growing everywhere!
Hi, yai! The world, how fair!"

DREAM SONG
(Chippewa)

In the Sky
I am walking,
A Bird
I accompany.

LOVE SONG
(Chippewa)

Oh
I am thinking
Oh
I am thinking
I have found my lover
Oh
I think it is so!

LOVE SONG
(Chippewa)

A loon I thought it was
But it was
My love's
Splashing oar.

CANOE BUILDER

Canoe builder
Appealing to Birch-tree
Lay aside your cloak, O birch tree!
Lay aside your white-skin wrapper -

THE CANOE

Like a yellow leaf in autumn
Like a yellow water lily.

TWO DREAM SONGS OF SIYAKA

Dream songs are the most precious spiritual possession of the individual, received by the vision-seeking youth, after much suffering and loneliness, in a dream.

At night may I roam
Against the winds may I roam
At night may I roam
When the owl is hooting
May I roam.

TWO DREAM SONGS OF SIYAKA Cont'd.

At dawn may I roam
Against the winds may I roam
At dawn may I roam
When the crow is calling
May I roam.

2.

Where the wind is blowing
The wind is roaring
I stand.

Westward the wind is blowing
The wind is roaring—
I stand.

OPENING PRAYER OF THE SUN DANCE
(Teton Sioux)

Grandfather!
A voice I am going to send,
Hear me!
All over the universe
A voice I am going to send,
Hear me,
Grandfather!
I will live!
I have said it.

LAST SONG OF SITTING BULL
(Teton Sioux)

A warrior
I have been.
Now
It is all over.
A hard time
I have.

FAMILY TREE

Love and concern for young and old is reflected in a humorous way by a Choctaw writer, Winnie Lewis Gravitt:

The Young Indian
He's like a pine tree
For he is tall and proud
And he is pretty good by himself
He's kinder scared in a crowd.

FAMILY TREE Cont'd.

The Young Girl
She's like a poplar
Slim, quick and gay
Makes you think of cool breezes
Even on a very hot day.

But the Old Man
He's like a bois d'arc
Hard gnarled and yellow-brown
For he's lived a pretty long time
Now likes to smoke and sit around.

Well, the Old Woman
She's like a cedar tree
Sorta fat and still and low
Her arms are big and her lap is broad
Ain't it too bad it's so?

A PRAYER OF THE NIGHT CHANT
(Navajo)

Tsegihi.
House made of dawn.
House made of evening light.
House made of the dark cloud.
House made of male rain.
House made of dark mist.
House made of female rain.
House made of pollen.
House made of grasshoppers.
Dark cloud is at the door.
The trail out of it is dark cloud.
The zigzag lightning stands high upon it.
Male deity!
Your offering I make.
I have prepared a smoke for you.
Restore my feet for me.
Restore my legs for me.
Restore my body for me.
Restore my mind for me.
This very day take out your spell for me.
Your spell remove for me.
Far off it has gone.
Happily I recover.
Happily my interior becomes cool.
Happily I go forth.
My interior feeling cool, may I walk.
No longer sore, may I walk.
Impervious to pain, may I walk.
With lively feeling may I walk.

A PRAYER OF THE NIGHT CHANT Cont'd.

As it used to be long ago, may I walk.
Happily may I walk.
Happily, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.
Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.
Happily may I walk.
Being as it used to be long ago, may I walk.
May it be beautiful before me.
May it be beautiful behind me.
May it be beautiful below me.
May it be beautiful above me.
May it be beautiful all around me.
In beauty it is finished.

PAPAGO SUN DANCE

The Papago ceremonial rites, chants and songs are prayers by which the earth is kept productive and intact. The dances are physical prayers to cure the ill, shape the weather; or for a successful hunt.

"In the east is the
dwelling of the sun.
On top of this dwelling place
The sun comes up and
travels over our heads.
Below we travel.
I raise my right hand
to the sun
And stroke my body
in the ceremonial
manner."

NAVAJO HORSE SONG

While other tribes farmed, the Navajo used their horses to become raiders or hunters, living in temporary hogans, remaining forever nomadic.

"My horse has a hoof
like striped agate;
His fetlock is like a fine
eagle plume;
His legs are like quick
lightning....
My horse has a tail like
a trailing black cloud....
I am wealthy,

NAVAJO HORSE SONG Cont'd.

because of him.
Before me peaceful,
Behind me peaceful,
Under me peaceful,
Over me peaceful,
All around me peaceful-
Peaceful voice
When he neighs
I am Everlasting and
Peaceful.
I stand for my horse."

MYTH OF THE MOUNTAINTOP WAY

That flowing water! That flowing water! My mind wanders across it.
That broad water! That flowing water! My mind wanders across it.
That old age water! That flowing water! My mind wanders across it.

CHANT, WHEN THEY SAW EACH OTHER, ORIGIN LEGEND

The earth is looking at me; it is looking up at me;
I, I am looking down at it.
I, I am happy, he is looking at me;
I, I am happy, I am looking at him.

The sun is looking at me; it is looking down at me;
I, I am looking up at it.
I, I am happy, it is looking at me;
I, I am happy, I am looking at it.

DAYLIGHT SONG

He has a voice, he has a voice.
Just at daylight the Mountain Bluebird calls.
The blue bird has a voice,
He has a voice, his voice melodious,
His voice melodious, that flows in gladness.
The bluebird calls, the bluebird calls.

Walking down a path
Walking in peace
Walking in ease;
All the little animals...
Clean, pure water
Cool, fresh air;
All the pretty flowers
And a thousand trees;
Just mother nature and me.

by Daniel VanFleet

LIFE

Living, Dying
Laughing, Crying
Loving, Hating
Failing, Trying
Hope, Despair
Selfish, Share
Good, Bad
Apathy, Care
Sweet, Bitter
Peace, War
Watch the score.

by Daniel VanFleet

NAMING THINGS

You name things
in order that you may know them.
The mountain. Look, that mountain,
it is black.
That is Black Mountain, my son.
That is Black Mountain, my brother.
The rocks. Look, the rocks,
they are red.
A lasting red stone color,
millions of years old,
no one forgets their name.
Black Mountain.
Red Rocks.

by Simon Ortiz

BLESSING

You open your face.
The rain falls on it.
Bless these streets, these buildings.
Bless these people, these cars.
Bless these lights, these words.
Bless this outside, Bless this inside.
Bless us.

by Simon Ortiz

GRAY

The color of the sky on
A rainy day,
Gray, a very unhappy feeling.
Gray, a tiny little donkey.
Gray hair of my grandfather.
Gray straightness of a sidewalk.
Gray, the color of smoke.
Gray, the misty fog of a marshland.

by Ernest Haven

Dark brown Navajo.
Worker of turquoise, silver.
Herds flocks of sheep.

by Donald Badoni

The sheep wandering
About looking for grasses.
Wanders all day long.
Stops long enough to chew on dry
Grasses. Goes wandering again.

by Terrence Begay

My horse galloping.
The sound of thunder hoof
Coming t[illegible]rds home.

by Alice Evans

THE HISTORY OF GOOD FUR ROBE

I heard
that in the long time ago,
our people came from the Underland
Good Fur Robe was the leader then
and teacher with brother and sister.
To make the people at one
and crops to grow,
they taught us Rites
(when all things stand together).
"Hold yourself up now," he said,
it being, you know, his pleasure
to see the people in a good way.

We journey again
and like the ancient ones
we leave what cannot be carried in our hearts.
And though in this way much is lost,
as the song says,
"We are simply on the earth,"
my brothers, "need we be afraid?"

by Vance Goodiron
November, 1968

My dear grandmother
I can hear her axe talking
In the dawn morning

by Archie Washburne

HOME

Home is where the heart is
Where we were born and grew up.
A nice warm place.
We go far away from it.
We never leave it for sure.

by Lee Bahe

THIN POEM

Skinny
me.
So
Thin.
Food,
Food,
I cry

THIN POEM Cont'd.

daily.
My
ribs
like
a
harp.
My
knees
like
a
cup.
The
wind
mocked
as
it
blew
me
back
and
forth.
Help!

by Betty Chase

Old reservation
Most beautiful land known
Red rocks standing tall.
Hiding small animals.
Holding up brown eagle's nest.

by Lorraine Cody

House.
Round, square.
With happy folk inside.
Sharing their love with each other.
House.

by Bessie Yazzie

THE ANSWER

I spoke to the buffalo
I prayed to the sun
And the Thunderbird answered.

I crawled for drops of water
and hunger stole my mind
The Thunderbird answered.

THE ANSWER Cont'd.

A wise-man came upon me
and gave me a helping hand
The Thunderbird answered.

by Floyd K. Oliver - (Rosebud Sioux)

I am happy
for I am
what the great ones
thought would die

by Sea-Flower

S UNDS

What do I hear?
Drums?
What do I hear?
Songs?
What do I hear?
Is it my people
so loud and clear
who have gathered here
from far and near
to decide what our children
will learn and speak?
YES!

by Martha West

BEING INDIAN IS.....

By Reuben Snake

Being Indian is having over 700,000 brothers and sisters!

Being Indian is feeling Grey Wolf, Thunder Chief, Smoke Walker are more beautiful names than Smith, Jones, Brown or Johnson.

Being Indian is watching John Wayne whip 50 of your kind with a single shot pistol and a rusty pocket knife on the late show.

Being Indian is having at least a dozen missionaries from 12 different faiths trying to save your heathen soul every year.

Being Indian is fighting with the U.S. Army to save your country from the evils of communism and against the U.S. Army on your reservation to keep the Corps of Engineers from stealing all of your land.

Being Indian is owning land and not being able to rent, lease, sell or even farm it yourself without BIA approval.

Being Indian is having every third person you meet tell you about his great grandmother who was a real Cherokee princess.

Being Indian is having 9 out of 10 people tell you how great they believe Jim Thorpe, Squanto, Tonto, and Little Beaver are.

Being Indian is belonging to a particular tribe that is the best of the 300 or more that still exist.

Being Indian is being broke all summer because you try to make every low-low around.

Being Indian is having the greatest grandparents in the world.

Being Indian is "graduating" from a reservation school and not being able to read an 8th grade English book from your white urban friend's school.

Being Indian is loving "frybread" and corn soup.

Being Indian is having at least one alcoholic relative put the touch on you once a day.

Being Indian is having high salaried BIA, PHS, CEC, HEW, and DCL white-collar bureaucrats tell you how much money is being spent on Indians these days.

Being Indian is having your teenage child come home from school and ask you about "the strange beliefs" of Indians that her/his teacher mentioned in school today.

Being Indian is waiting (impatiently) for the new Tecumseh, Osceola, Crazy Horse, and Geronimo to appear.

Being Indain is missing work at least two days a month because so many of your friends and relatives are dying.

Being Indian is living on borrowed time after your 44th birthday.

Being Indian is having your all Indian school team playing against 7 men on the basketball court, 15 men on the football field, and 12 men on the baseball diamond.

Being Indian is listening to all the middle class Tontos and Uncle Tomahawks tell you we must do things the "American Way".

Being Indian is watching your daughter give away her only pair of overshoes to her friend because she only has to walk six blocks to school and her friend lives in the country.

Being Indian is having white do-gooders continue to do for you instead of with you.

Being Indian is never making quick evaluations of people, but reserving judgement until their actions show what kind of people they really are.

Being Indian is feeding anyone and everyone who comes to your door hungry, with whatever you have.

Being Indian is feeling the stares of all the "whiteys" in any public place you walk into.

I KNOW, I KNOW

THE CROW COMES EVERYDAY TO TELL THE OWL
of the steel tooth eaters appetite
FOR HOLLOW TREES AND THE LIKE
and patiently the owl listens
AND DOLEFULLY REPLIES
I know
I know
I know
I KNOW

by Philip Sultz

PLASTIC PARIS INDIANS

I was sent into the city by the man from BIA
What I saw there wasn't pretty, so I'm going home today.
I went into a fancy store to get out of the cold,
And what I saw while I was there is something to behold;

Plastic Paris Indians in every store I saw,
What they will do for money should be against the law.

I got into Chicago and looked around their stores,
Their Indian clothes annoyed my nose — I had to go outdoors.
Italian Indian suedes and Italian moccasins.
The descendants of Columbus are out to get our skins.

Plastic Paris Indians, now many fall for you?
And what a waste of money for something that ain't true.

Standing in their window was a plastic Indian maid
Holding up an ear of corn and catering to the trade.
A few years back in time -- it wasn't back too far —
I saw that Indian once before with a handful of cigars.

Plastic Paris Indians, you hurt my heart so bad
To see my tribal colors so easy to be had.

The rich and white old ladies stood by the Indian maid
Their wrinkles under warpaint, their fat beneath the suede.
I said to them, "I'm Indian — I'm proud I'm Indian too."
They called a guard who threw me out like an old bowl of corn stew.

Plastic Paris Indians, you're like the BIA —
You sell our souls for money, you throw our lives away.

When I think of what is wasted on that Plastic Paris stuff
While last winter we ate dog meat — and didn't have enough.
We bought our water in barrels. They waste it here like hell.
If they really want to be like us, they should live like us as well.

PLASTIC PARIS INDIANS Cont'd.

Plastic Paris Indians — just what have you gone through
To earn your right to be Indian?
Your clothes are as fake as you.

by Robert Bacon

METIS

My hair is straight and black,
my skin is light
my eyes of jade and my cheekbones high.

My face a reminder of past times
when a people was forgotten
and treaties signed.

Of times now
when my people are crying
because of hate

Of times then
when two people lived
in spite of hate.

Of times then
when two people loved
without fear or guilt.

Of times then
when two people died
leaving behind nothing
but I.

by Martha West

RUSHMORE/CRAZY HORSE

Four faces — who are they?
These four faces on our sacred land —
Sitting Bull?
Crazy Horse?
Gall?
Red Cloud?
Pa Sapa — who are they?

No these are four white faces
In the Black Hills.
Would you carve images
On your mother's womb?

And yet
You let
Them do it to our mother.

Four white faces
and many red faces
On Rushmore —
Indian songs on their lips.
Indian pride in their hearts.
While the white heart
Remains of stone.
And the stone faces of the white tourists
Look up
To the four stone faces
Looking down,
Crying tears of stone
For the people it dispossessed.

by Robert Bacon

ALASKA '70

the icy creek is singing
in tune with the northern lights —
in a blue tent
we are alone within the
mountain's heart.

by Denise Lassaw

NIGHT FALL

I didn't see
the dark come down
it fell so fast
around the town
so suddenly
I didn't see

All the night
started whispering
and I felt the brush
of a moth's wing
soft, little and light
in the night

I sat alone
with the night-sound
and the moon half-out
and the dew around

NIGHT FALL Cont'd.

on grass and stone
I sat alone

I never knew
the night before
I knew the day
I saw it more
I like night, too
I never knew

by Cecelia Hollow Horn Bear - (Rosebud Sioux)

SOMEONE I LOVE

She gave me all she had
When she had something to
give
Someday she will die
I'll try not to cry,
But deep inside
I won't know how to go on;
For she made me
What I am.
She was there
When I needed her the
most
When I had problems,
I turned to her
I helped her all I could.
No one seems to care
About her and she knows.
I get so mad sometimes
Because they don't stop
To ask how she is doing,
They never have the time.
If she ever told me to do
Anything that was
impossible
I would make it possible,
Because I love my great-
grandmother
More than anything or
anyone
Other than God.
I won't cry when she dies
I know she'll be happy
And would want me to be.

by A senior classman - (Rosebud Sioux)

JUST TAKE A LOOK...

Listen people and listen well
To my thoughts that I will tell
Especially you who are in High Office
And you who have never never noticed
Why do you send things to faraway lands
When there are poor people close at hand
We owned this land for years and years
We roamed this land for thousands of years
You say that this is a thriving nation
Just take a good look at our reservations
You talk real loud about world peace
While in this nation there is too much grief
You came here for Freedom of Religion
Tell me what happened to our Religions
You brought your cultures to this land
And now our culture hardly stands
You came and got rich on our land
You tried to exterminate us from our land
The great spirit he understands
He's the one who helps us stand
You say that this is a thriving nation
Just take a good look at our reservations
You say that this is a thriving nation
Just take a good look at our reservations.

by Larry Stabber

LITTLE INDIANS SPEAK

People said, "Indian children are hard to teach.
Don't expect them to talk."
One day stubby little Ray said,
"Last night the moon went all the way with me,
When I went out to walk."

People said, "Indian children are very silent.
Their only words are no and yes."
But small, ragged Pansy confided softly,
"My dress is old, but at night the moon is kind;
Then I wear a beautiful moon-colored dress."

People said, "Indian children are dumb.
They seldom make a reply."
Clearly I hear wee Delores answer,
"Yes, the sunset is so good. I think God is throwing
A bright shawl around the shoulders of the sky."

People said, "Indian children have no affection.
They just don't care for anyone."
Then I feel Ramon's tiny hand and hear him whisper,

"A wild animal races in me since my mother sleep
under the ground.
Will it always run and run?"

People said, "Indian children are rude.
They do not seem very bright."
Then I remember Joe Henry's remark,
"The tree is hanging down her head because the
sun is staring at her, White people always stare.
They do not know it is not polite."

People said, "Indian children never take you in.
Outside their thoughts you'll always stand."
I have forgotten the idle words that People said,
But treasure the day when iron door swung wide,
And I slipped into the heart of Pima land.

by Juanita Bell

If light were dark
And dark were light
The moon a hole
In the blaze of night,
A raven's wing
As bright as tin -
Then you my friend
Would be black as sin.

by Raymond Montoya, Jr.

"WHAT IS THIS UPON MY LAND?"

Was it yesterday...
That man reached the moon.
Is it today he stands upon its surface.
You marvel that man travels so far, so fast.

If they have traveled far
Then I have traveled farther...
If they have traveled fast
Then I have traveled faster.

For I was born a thousand years ago
My life style unique...beautiful.
But within half a lifetime
I was flung across the ages.
From bows and arrows to atom bombs
Is a distance far beyond
A flight to the moon.

"WHAT IS THIS UPON MY LAND?" Cont'd.

I was born when people loved all nature
And spoke to it as though it listened.

When I was young
I remember a clear river, good to drink.
When I was young
I remember a clear sky, good to breathe
Beautiful to look upon.
When I was young
I can remember an early morning
Watching the sunlight fires
Dance upon the mountains.

I can remember an uncharred earth,
And singing a song of thanks
For all this beauty...
Singing so very very softly.

Suddenly, strangers came.
Then more and more and more...
Like a crushing rushing wave they came.
Hurling the years aside.

Suddenly, I find myself a young man
In the midst of the twentieth century.
I find myself and my people
Adrift in this new age
But not a part of it.
Engulfed by its rushing tide,
But only as a captive eddy,
Going round...and round...and around.

On tiny plots of land
We float in a kind of unreality,
Uncertain of our grip upon the present
Weak in our hopes for the future.

We know full well the stories of our people,
As they lived in the old life
The grand old stories of our people...
When there was dignity,
A feeling of worth...
Unspoken confidence
And certain knowledge of the paths
They walked upon.

Let none forget
We are a people with special rights
Guaranteed to us by promises...
Treaties.

"WHAT IS THIS UPON MY LAND?" Cont'd.

We did not beg for these rights
We do not thank you that we have them.
We have paid for them
With our lives, our dignity, our self respect.
Shall we remain today
A beaten race...
Impoverished, conquered?

by LeRoy B. Selam

THE MAN FROM WASHINGTON

The end came easy for most of us.
Packed away in our crude beginnings
in some far corner of a flat world,
we didn't expect much more
than firewood and buffalo robes
to keep us warm. The man came down,
a slouching dwarf with rainwater eyes,
and spoke to us. He promised
that life would go on as usual,
that treaties would be signed, and everyone —
man, woman and child — would be innoculated
against a world in which we had no part,
a world of wealth, promise and fabulous disease.

by James Welch (Blackfeet-Gros Ventre)

DIRECTION

I was directed by my grandfather
To the East,
    so I might have the power of the bear;
To the South,
    so I might have the courage of the eagle;
To the West,
    so I might have the wisdom of the owl;
To the North,
    so I might have the craftiness of the fox;
To the Earth,
    so I might receive her fruit;
To the Sky,
    so I might lead a life of innocence.

by Alonzo Lopez (Papago)

AMBITION

This summer I shall
Return to our Longhouse,
Hide beneath a feathered hat,
And become an Old Man.

by Phil George (Nez Perce)

ONCE AGAIN

Let go of the present and death.
Go to the place nearest the stars,
gather twigs, logs;
build a small fire,
a huge angry fire.

Gather nature's skin,
wet it, stretch it,
make a hard drum,
fill it with water
to muffle the sound.

Gather dry leaves, herbs,
feed into the fire.
Let the smoke rise
up to the dark sky,
to the roundness of the sun.

Moisten your lips,
loosen your tongue,
let the chant echo
from desert, to valley, to peak —
wherever your home may be.

Remember the smoke,
the chants, the drums,
the stick grandfather held
as he spoke in the dark
of the power of his fathers?

Gather your memories
into a basket, into a pot,
into your cornhusk bag, and
grandfather is alive
for us to see once again.

by Liz Sohappy (Yakima)

LONELINESS

Loneliness is being alone,
Thinking of sad things you did.
Maybe you upset someone you love.
Maybe you were left behind.
Loneliness is being left alone in
A place you've never been before,
Living with people you've never
Met, sent to a new, unknown school.
Loneliness is getting into trouble
Where everyone is against you.
Loneliness is being away from the
Love of your mother, father, sister
Brother.
Loneliness is being mad with
Yourself.

by Ray Blackwater

CLASS HOUR

Mean teacher standing
Not even a sound being made
Students, tired of sitting,
Looking at the lazy clock,
Wish the period would end now.

by Tom Yellowman

Looking sad and lost
My mother stands at the door
While I am leaving.

by Lee Bahe

HOMECOMING

With tears in their eyes,
And big smiles on their faces,
Happy are my parents.

by Lorraine Cody

YESTERDAY

Yesterday you murdered to take our land.
Today you've changed your tactics --
you smile, talk in big words, then
bring out a piece of paper.
That's really a change from yesterday, isn't it?

NO DEAL:

The land is ours; we will not sign.
You ask us to put out a dollar sign
before the lives you've taken, the years of
starvation, sickness and oppression we've been through?
Can your bill of sale promise us change?
You ask us to put a dollar sign on the deaths of all...
on the deaths of all our people
and our way of life before you came?

NO THANKS:

We won't sell the only thing that we have left,
You may resort to yesterday's tactics;
yesterday we didn't know what you wanted.
Now we do, and we are ready --

NOW SMILE:

by June Leivas
Chemehuevi Newsletter

Who will sing the sun's song now
in the medicine lodge
who will cast the bones
from the yellow bag
who will read the secrets
of the smoke
and the seed talk of the rattling gourd
in the white nights
now that he is gone

by Ben Benson

IF I DIE IN VIETNAM

If I die in Vietnam,
Take me back where I came from
And lay me in the soil
There, upon some mountain high
Where I can feel the cool winds blow

IF I DIE IN VIETNAM Cont'd.

Where the cool, clean fresh winds blow
The sun and rain and snow
Forever on my face.
Take me there if I must die.

If I die in Vietnam,
Take me back where I came from,
Nevermore to make a stand
Here in this war-torn land,
Where every man's slave
To Death's eternal grave.
Take me back where I came from
And lay me in God's hand.

If I die in Vietnam
Take me back where I came from,
To American, that was once beautiful,
To America that was once f-r-e-e,
For I have done my share
and hope some day
The protected will have a taste of
Freedom.

by L/Cpl P. Humphrey
In Vietnam

My eyes are blue, my skin is light;
I can't be an Indian 'cause I don't look right.
I don't know if I'm red or white,
But one thing's sure: I never feel right.

I got no papers to prove what I'm saying.
So my Indian blood is awful hard to explain.
When I try to tell it and make it plain,
Everybody reaches for the salt and takes another grain.

The government don't consider me
In anything they do,
They don't want another Indian,
So what am I supposed to do?

And when I talk to Indians about my need to identify,
They just act funny and give me the old fish eye,
I'm more like the Indians, and they think that's wise,
But they don't quite trust my big blue eyes.

My kin say they are white, but they know it's not true,
And they are all embarrassed 'cause of the way I do.
I tried to be like them, but I guess I never will.
To me there's a lot more to life than another dollar bill.

Cont'd.

My outlook on life don't correspond to white,
So it stands to reason I can't be right
Since I can't be Indian, at least not quite,
I've got a lot of problems, 'cause I know I'm not white.

I was in the Army once, and to my surprise,
They called me Tonto-with-the-Big Blue-Eyes,
Crazy Indian described me and my class,
But it got even worse and they called us blanket --- (Indians).

I don't know what to do to make things right,
But life's sure uncomfy between red and white.

by Bob Christian

THE BATTLE'S NOT OVER YET

Though countless bodies of dead
lay behind us, and rivers no more
carry the blood the warriors
and soldiers of battle,
the trees still whisper the last words
of each dying man.

Though the war dance has stopped
and the quick, sure-footed braves
no longer dance, and Time has covered
the traces of the horses on the battlefield
the marching feet can still be heard.

Though no bodies of warrior, nor soldier,
lie twisted and torn, and no expressions
or moans of agony are seen or heard,
and the bugles no more sound the attack,
and the battle cry has not been heard
the wind still relays the message
of the drumbeats.

Though no thundersticks sound
and no cannons roar, and the smoke
has long since cleared on the battlefield
the low murmur of the tom toms
goes on and on, and each star in the
heavens takes life from these brave
warriors of battle.

THE BATTLE'S NOT OVER YET Cont'd.

Though the places of battle still lie
in the sun, and no trace of war remains,
though all the sounds of war are all unheard
the battle's raging still, loudly
yet silently. Not killing, yet
killing, too.

Each time I look into the setting sun,
I know that victory's yet to come,
And justice will be done
When the last battle has been won.

by June Leivas
from the Chemehuevi Newsletter

ALCATRAZ....LIVES!

You say they're gone????

All taken off...
all pushed off...
all pulled off...
all ripped off...

You say they're gone????

Listen then, listen long —

Hear that laughter...
Hear that cry...
Hear that child...
Hear that prayer...

Listen then, listen long.

The winds carry their songs
The sun carries their warmth
The winds carry their songs
The grass whispers their words.

You say they're gone????

Listen...whiteman...
Listen long.

by HaiHai PaWo PaWo

Red/White -- and blue

I met a pretty city girl -- Indian, she said.
She said she'd heard of Custer and she knew her skin was red.
But outside of those facts and inside of her mind
She wasn't sure just who she was or what she'd left behind.

She didn't know her tribe; she didn't know her land --
All she knew was welfare and the charity helping-hand.
She must have had some pride, but it was deep within
Beaten down by foster homes that tried to change her skin.

They tried to make her "civilized" -- they made her white instead.
She laughed away their insults, but she cried herself to bed.
"Why did you do this to me? she cried in outraged shame.
"You took away my parents and you took away my name!"

"You forced me into poverty, then said I was to blame
"Cause my father drank your white man's wine and mother took his name.
"Their land was taken from them" their home, their pride, -- and me.
"How can you claim to judge them and put your claim on me?"

"A lie!" I cry in tearful pain. I run out of the room.
"You didn't raise your hand" she said, "you'll stay this afternoon."
"I'll stay, okay, but when I leave I won't be going home.
"I have no home in this town; I'll go my way alone."

Another Indian seeing red; another leaving town.
"I'm free and red" to me she said, "No whites can tie me down.
"I'm back upon my mother earth, beneath my father sky.
"I'm back where I belong now, back where my people died."

Red and white and blue, and searching for a home,
Searching for a way of life that white has left alone.
I wish them that they find it; I hope they find that place
I wish they'd take me with them back to the human race.

by Robert Bacon

RED EAGLE

Red Eagle,
Cold, dead, noble, Red Eagle.
Tomorrow they will bury you in Black Hill.
They think you have left me forever.
When I grow lonely for you
  I will walk into the night
  and listen to your brother, the wind.
He will tell me if you want me.
I will follow the path through the forest
  upon which your moccasins
  have trod so many times.
I will hear the night sounds you
  have told me about.
I will walk into the valley of Minnelosa,
  the sweet grass.
In the white moonlight I will pray.
I will pray to the spirits
  and they will speak to me
  as they have spoken to you before.
Then I will touch your tree and you
  will softly whisper to me.
From the wind, from the night, from the tree,
  from the sweet grass,
You will whisper to me,
Red Eagle, Red Eagle,
  Upon the mountain.

by Janet Campbell (Coeur d'Alene)

LONELINESS

The deafening tic-tic-tic of the clock,
The thunder of my own thoughts rumble 'round
The dark room crowding its silence in upon me.
Where are my friends? What is there to do?
The slow steady pounding of my lonesome heart,
The never-ending thump-thump-thump of my pulse
Against a wet pillow, the only living sounds to listen to!
Visions drift slowly past my eyes...
Visions of scarred, contorted trees standing in barren,
  desolate fields...
Visions of solitary children standing in deserted alleys
With tears washing clean rivulets down their dirty faces...
Visions of old men, old women, dying with hopelessness
And agony twisted into their aged masks of death...
Visions of neglected tombstones crumbling by
Abandoned churches...Oh God!
Where are my friends?
Someone, please come and talk to me!

by Loyal Shegonee (Potawatomi)

THIS IS A SIGN

there is dew on the grass
this is a sign
the edge of the sky is white
this is a sign
the sun is dustred coming up
this is a sign

then the morning comes
and the sun burns brighter
lines of little clouds rise
out of the earths edge
this too is a sign

now we wait in the dry grass
now we wait in the hot sand
my sheep my dogs and i
watching the sky

the signs tell rain
but the signs have told rain before
and there has been no rain

the bellies of the sheep are thin
my eyes go blind
the dogs are dying.

by Norman H. Russell (Cherokee)

INDIAN LOVE LETTER

Lady of the crescent moon
tonight I look at the sky
You are not there
You are not mad at me, are you?
"You are angry at the people,
Yes, I know."
they are changing
be not too hard
If you were taken to
the mission school,
not because you wanted,
but someone thought it best for you
you too would change.

They came out of nowhere
telling us how to eat our food
how to build our homes
how to plant our crops.
Need I say more of what they did?
All is new -- the old ways are nothing.